



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION
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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the management of ACT school infrastructure

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Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion

Inquiry into the management of ACT school infrastructure

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the management of ACT School infrastructure.

In order to submit to this inquiry the Duffy Primary Parents and Citizens Association conducted a survey of Duffy Primary School parents and carers in early May 2021 to garner community views on the topics covered by this inquiry.

The survey results showed the following were areas of most concern to our school community. Many parent concerns relate to the age of the school and there being a general feeling that there is little attention paid to renewal and reinvigoration of the older school sites.

1. planning for the ongoing maintenance of school facilities, including the process to identify and address current and future infrastructure needs in schools

There is a lack of visibility of the infrastructure planning process, priorities and expected timelines for upgrades. Parents have noted that when infrastructure requirements are identified they can take several years to receive funding or may not receive funding at all. It also appears to be up to the school to identify individual infrastructure needs, with little to no 'ACT wide' initiatives for infrastructure – such as ensuring all ACT schools have adequate and up to standard play equipment or shade structures.

The P&C is able to raise infrastructure requests or suggestions through the school leadership team and school board, however there is no formal avenue or process to seek community views on school infrastructure needs.

Covered outdoor learning area (COLA)

The funding of infrastructure is a particular concern for the Duffy P&C. Duffy Primary has been wanting to cover its main black top area to provide a covered outdoor learning area for many years.

Considering Canberra's hot summers with frequent extreme heat and searingly high UV levels, covered outdoor learning areas are essential and should be included in any school design – particularly primary schools, where children are too young to be responsible for their own sun safety and future skin health. Covered outdoor learning areas are present at newer public schools, as they are at private schools; this is not accidental, COLAs are a standard feature on school grounds these days precisely because they are

considered essential to children's physical and mental health and wellbeing, as well as being beneficial to their learning and development. COLAs are not an optional, luxury add-on.

A COLA would provide:

- An all-weather play space, allowing children to access the outdoors on rainy days, but also provide a large shaded area for summer
- Additional learning spaces; and
- A large covered space to allow for school and community events, such as assemblies and fetes. This aspect is particularly important now that our school has grown significantly and the hall struggles to accommodate a full school assembly with parents attending. COVID-19 venue capacity restrictions have further exacerbated this issue, which is likely to continue for some time.

The inability of the school to obtain funding for this project has meant that the P&C has been fundraising to provide this for the school. To date the P&C has raised almost \$60,000 towards this project. Many parents feel frustrated and upset that to get this project completed the P&C will need to partially fund this infrastructure, instead of the entire project being funded by the ACT Government. Anecdotally, we have heard that several other ACT schools have also fundraised to provide similar shade structures at their schools. This shows a lack of government support for infrastructure that the community considers vital and is present in other, newer, schools.

Play equipment

In recent years the P&C was advised of some issues relating to the kindergarten playground. This was that:

- The playground could not be covered with a shade structure due to gas pipelines being in the area; and
- The play equipment could not be moved to another area as it did not meet current Australian standards.

As a result, nothing has been done, and the children play on outdated, out of standard equipment, in the sun.

Much of the playground equipment at Duffy Primary is worn, outdated and visibly lacking in comparison with the modern equipment available to children who attend newer public schools. Playground equipment requires review and renewal to ensure that it reflects modern thinking on children's development and safety, and that children who attend older public schools are not left to "make do" with old play equipment that has not been upgraded in decades.

2. the adequacy of heating and cooling systems in schools

Many parents (and feedback from students) felt that heating and cooling systems, particularly cooling, is not adequate and is inconsistent across the school. Many parents also suggested that air purifiers need to be included across the school.

3. classroom design

Duffy Primary school is an 'open plan' school. There are many differing views across the Duffy parent community as to whether open plan learning is optimal for all children or year levels, with some parents strongly in support, others strongly against and most somewhere in between. Whilst this inquiry is not designed to consider the policy regarding 'open plan learning', there are several issues relating to design and capacity that are of concern to community members.

- If open plan learning does not suit an individual child's needs, there is little to no choice for parents to move their children to another nearby school, due to capacity constraints and 'zoning'.
- As the school gets closer to its capacity, there are limited options within the school to cater for children who do not cope well in an open plan environment.
- Some parents have suggested that additional quiet spaces or smaller classrooms are required.

Another policy issue, relating to classroom design which is of concern to many P&C members is the ACT Education directorates classification and identification of areas that could be considered 'teaching or learning spaces'. The directorate has identified thoroughfare spaces between classrooms in a transportable building as a space that could house a classroom. This is totally inappropriate and would not be conducive to optimal learning outcomes.

The transportable building is excessively noisy, despite the placement of sound dampening fixtures, and careful consideration needs to be given to the location of classes and class sizes for this building. The outcome of adding open plan design into a noisy transportable building has not been optimal and despite best efforts from teaching staff, many parents have complained about this since the building was first installed.

4. the adequacy of parking and bike storage facilities;

The Duffy P&C is very thankful for the parking expansion that was completed approximately 3 years ago. Despite almost doubling parking out the front of the school, parking and safety remains a significant issue for parents. We understand that the school has met with the directorate on many occasions to try to expand parking near the preschool, however site conditions, primarily trees, have meant this is not possible.

Duffy Primary upgraded its bike storage capacity approximately 1 year ago. From the P&C's understanding, the school had requested funding to upgrade the bike storage facility for several years and had been unable to get budget approval. The overcrowded bike storage resulted in damage to bikes and difficulties for younger children accessing their bikes. The bike storage upgrade subsequently had to be included in other works to ensure it could be completed.

5. accessibility for students and staff with disabilities;

Duffy Primary has an autism unit and has several students with disabilities and different abilities. Duffy Primary has made improvements to its accessibility over the past few years, including upgrades to the front of the school and better visibility of the ramp.

Further improvements are still needed, particularly in regards to ensuring doors are automated, ensuring ramp gradients meet accessibility standards, making accessible pathways throughout the school, accessible egress and emergency warning systems for people with disability, and incorporating tactile floor markings for people who are blind.

6. accessibility of school facilities by local communities

There was a strong response from parents regarding access to school facilities, particularly to the 'pump' bike track and playground. Since the school had fencing erected around it, the school play equipment has not been accessible. This is of particular concern to the community as there is no other play or park equipment in the local area.

However, the P&C also acknowledges that opening the school grounds to the community outside of school hours would also come with risks of damage, unsociable use and risk to the children with broken glass and or other dangerous items being left (which happened before the school was fenced).

While outside the scope of this inquiry, if the government invested in local parks and infrastructure, including the refresh of the Duffy shops and children's playground, that would go some way to addressing this concern while ensuring the school infrastructure is protected for use during school hours.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and for considering our submission.

Cath Collins
president
Duffy Primary P&C